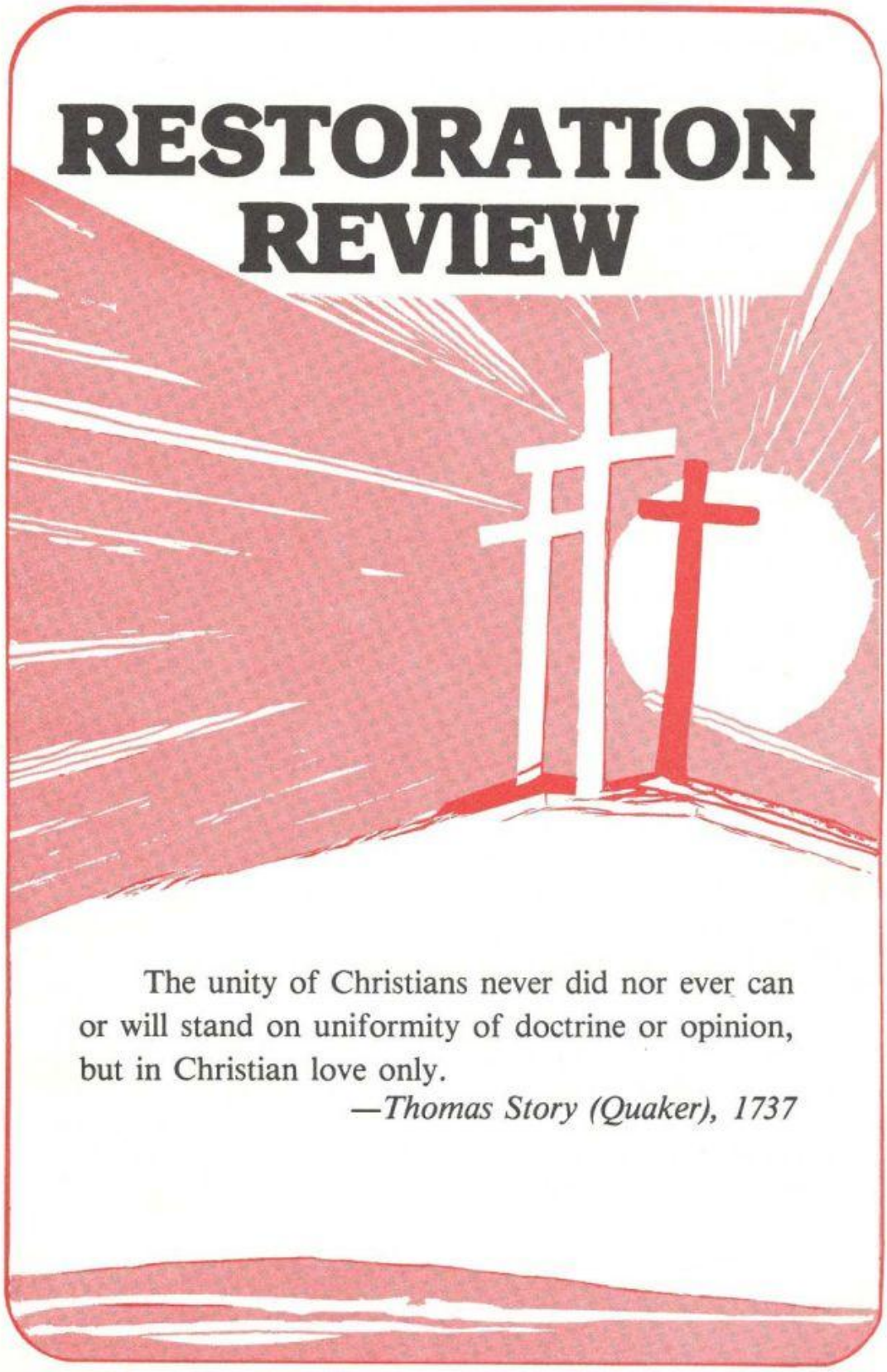
RESTORATION REVIEW



The unity of Christians never did nor ever can or will stand on uniformity of doctrine or opinion, but in Christian love only.

—Thomas Story (Quaker), 1737

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The Doe of the Dawn: A Christian World View. . .

THE HOPE OF HISTORY

Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were digged. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you. --- Is. 51:1-2

These lines indicate that when the prophet ministered to his people exiled in Babylon he preached the hope of history. He goes on to assure them that "the Lord will comfort Zion" and he will "make her wilderness like Eden," but such hope was based upon what God had already done in history. "Look to Abraham" he tells them, pointing out that Abraham was but one when God called him, but now his children are a nation with a great destiny. The hope of history!

We all have some kind of view of history, or a philosophy of history, even if it be as crude as Henry Ford's "History is bunk" or as fatalistic as "History repeats itself." In this essay we are saying that a responsible view of history, one rooted in God's revelation, is vital for a Christian world view. Indeed, the Creator of this universe is to be honored as the God of history and as a history-making God. He is the arbiter of history, supervising and over-ruling human events so that his *ultimate* purposes will prevail.

I say *ultimate* purposes because it is evident that many things that happen are not only contrary to what the Creator intends but temporarily thwart his will. Evil often triumphs over good, whether in institutions, nations, or individuals, but the hope of history is that ultimately God's eternal pur-poses for us and the universe will be realized. "He watches over his word to perform it," as one of the prophets puts it, or he is "in history" to make sure it comes out right. One who has read the end of a bock and knows that it all turns out all right does not have to be disturbed over events in the earlier chapters. The hope of history is not that we have read the end of the book, but that our heavenly Father has *writ-ten* it!

Part of what I want to say is reflected in the words of a college student who told his counselor that he wanted to study history. "History of what?" asked the counselor. The student, a bit confused by the question, replied that he did not want to study the history of anything in particular, just history. In like manner we are not looking at the history of anything in particular but at history in general, which may defined as all that has happened and is happening, which relates to all that will happen.

So we distinguish between history --- all that God, angels, demons, man, animals and insects have done and are doing --- and historiography, or *written* history, which is only a scant account of what has transpired. When Jesus said, “My Father works even until now and I work,” he was talking about history, only a small part of which is ever chronicled. While we value what is written, our larger view involves all that God and man have done, are doing, and will do. There is little or nothing that we can know about most of what has happened in our universe and universes beyond, but it is important that we realize that the unknown events are part of history.

One’s view of history has often affected the course of human events. Karl Marx’s economic interpretation of history has inspired several revolutionary movements and has captured the minds of upwards of half the world. Marx’s theory, known as dialectical materialism, holds that economic factors determine the course of history and that class conflict is the pivotal factor. Class conflicts affect production of goods, which in turn affects the social process. Changes in the social process in turn affects class relations, and so an evolutionary process of tensions goes on and on, which is the idea of dialectical, until the perfect socialistic state evolves.

The Marxist sees five stages in the process. Four have already appeared and the fifth, the “classless society” or pure communism, is on the horizon. Society has already passed through the system of primitive communism, the ancient system of slave labor, the system of feudal serfdom, and, because of recent Communistic revolutions, society is now passing through the stage of industrial capitalism with its doctrine of self-interest. So, according to Marxism, the world is presently divided into two economic classes: the bourgeois or the capitalists, and the proletarian or the wage-earning workers. This causes the exploitation of the workers, and the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Because of the built-in motive of self-interest, the capitalists resist any change to the system, Marxism charges, and so the way out is “the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions,” as Marx put it.

Herein lies the danger of Communism. Even by theory it is an oppressive system, imposing its will upon all who will not conform, and by any means within its power. Communists are always stirring up unrest and conflict, for they are sure that this will move society toward that ideal state that follows the rule: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” To accomplish this the individual must be sacrificed for the good of the state, and what is morally right is what promotes Communism. And it is materialistic in that it sees history as strictly determined by economic forces with no God at the controls.

It is wise for us to realize that Communism is a way of looking at history. To those of us who believe in God history is the working out of a divine purpose. To the Communist there is no God and no divine purpose, and no place for faith except in the blind, driving forces of dialectical materialism and a philosophy that might makes right. Communism will do anything, including the murder of innocent people, to promote or defend its cause. It demonstrates that the way we view history is very significant indeed. A nation that recognizes no power at work except the arbitrary forces of an evolutionary process has no basis for a moral conscience.

A less offensive view was that of Oswald Spengler, who saw history in terms of the rise and fall of nations. In his *Decline of the West* he examined the causes of the decay of ancient cultures and concluded that the same influences are at work in the West: the rise of great cities wherein life is artificial, fast, and shallow; the evil influence of big money; man becoming a slave to the machine; imperialism and absolute government; tendency toward race suicide; skepticism. And so, he concluded the West is decaying.

The believer can agree with Spengler that we cannot afford a superficial optimism, and that we must face up to the signs of decay in our social order. But Spengler sees the decay of nations as inevitable. There is no hope of history. If the decay of nations is a certainty, then the rise of the kingdom of God upon earth is a living hope. We believe the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of Christ in God's tomorrow.

There are other interesting views of history, such as Albert Schweitzer's ethical view that "the will to live," which pervades all living things, calls for a "reverence for life" as the only possible standard for a civilization. He too saw the "suicide of civilization," mostly in the growing disrespect for thinking and for an ethical world view, and in our narrow, superficial specializations. Industrial progress meant little to Schweitzer if it meant a neglect of the enhancement of man's moral energy. But Schweitzer did little to reach beyond man's own inner resources to those fountains of renewal that come only from the Creator. Any world view that holds that somehow man can save himself can no more be trusted than a broken tooth.

Then there is the cyclical view of history, which has been called "eternal recurrence" or described as history repeating itself. As seasons move in cycles so does history. The Eastern religions apply this view to reincarnation in which every individual life is seen as a succession of lives existing repeatedly in limitless time. This view is prominent in India today, where everything is seen as eternal and repetitious, and where the transition of life is conceived as a transmigration or as a perpetual wheel of rebirths.

A Christian world view, on the other hand, sees each soul as distinctive, as created in the image of God, and that if an individual experiences another birth it is a spiritual birth that comes from above. Such a faith finds meaning and purpose in each person, which is lost in the Indian concept of reincarnation. With such a view one soon finds no meaning to life and a barren fatalism snuffs out any hope for tomorrow.

The hope of history is a theme of Scripture. “In the beginning God. . .” sets the tone. We can believe that the God who started all this in such a glorious way can and will bring it to fruition with even greater glory. As the spiritual puts it, *He’s got the whole wide world in his hands!*

The theme of the hope of history goes even deeper when Scripture pictures God upon his throne, saying, *Behold, I make all things new.* The Creator is continually renewing all his creation, whether man, animals, plants, the earth, and down the road is the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven to bless a redeemed mankind.

What a blessing it is to be a part of all this! The faith we hold is a historical faith, more so than any other world religion, in that it is based upon actual events in history, especially the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah, whom we believe to have been Jesus of Nazareth, who was a human being like us, who grew up in the hill country of Judea, not unlike the way we grew up. History! Jesus was there just as we are there, a figure of history. But he was more than that. He became the superintendent of history. It is now all in his hands, and he will see it through.

This kind of thinking was too much for the apostle Paul, who set forth a substantial philosophy of history in Romans 9-11, where he says in essence that in due time God will do all that he has promised, including the “bringing in” of the Jews. But he will do it in his own way and in his own time. It was “In the fullness of time” that the Christ came, Paul reminds us in Gal. 4:4, and in Rom. 11:25 he talks about *until,* a strong historical word, “until the full number of Gentiles come in.” Then Israel will be saved. There was clearly the hope of history in Paul’s faith.

But still it was too much for him, for he concluded his view of history with: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

It is a good place to stop --- and to start --- in our hope of history. --- *the Editor*

Christians, of all people, should not be surprised that the historical process is deeply ironic. Redemptive history, after all, is one story after another of God turning the intentions of men, good and bad, to his own better and wiser purpose. Joseph's brothers intended to kill him, but God deflected this evil to the rescue of an entire people. "You intended to harm me; but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:30). From the monarchy, which Israel had erected in defiance, God raised up the house of David in whose seed all nations would be blessed. In history's ultimate irony death and hell were crushed at the cross even as they exulted in momentary triumph. --- from *The Search for Christian America*, p. 154

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AND GOD CREATED PRINTING

As I write in this volume and the next about my view of men and things, there is no way to pass over the importance of printing. Lately I have been reading about Martin Luther's role in the great Protestant Reformation, which was both social and religious, and I was reminded of the fact that there could never have been such a reformation had it not been for the printing press, which at that time was barely a half century old. But in that half century some eight million books were printed! What a contrast to centuries past when but few books could be produced by the tedious process of copying by hand!

While the Chinese had movable type as early as 1040 A.D. they made little use of it, mainly because their language had thousands of word-characters. Printing on a large scale had to await the printing press invented by that enterprising German, Johann Gutenberg, in about 1455, who had the advantage of working with only a 26-letter alphabet. And what could be more appropriate than that the first book off the press was a Bible, in Latin of course since that was the language of the church.

In reading about Luther my eyes fell upon a sentence that so excited me that I had to call my printer and tell him about it. The historian tells how Luther was one of the most gifted German writers in history and how he wrote in clear, simple style to the masses *in their vernacular,* leaving it to the scholars to write only to each other in their lofty Latin. Using pamphlets as his vehicle he reached out to all of Europe with his ideas of reformation. Erasmus, the most influential scholar at that time, is quoted as saying: "Luther's books are everywhere and in every language; no one would believe how widely he has moved men."

Then the historian made the statement that captured my heart and mind: *Printing was the Reformation; Gutenberg made Luther possible.*

How beautifully true! Since I agree with Alexander Campbell that the Protestant Reformation was one of God's greatest gifts to human kind, including Roman Catholics, I really identified with the historian in the way he summarized it. Printing *was* the Reformation! My printer was pleased to learn that his form of art had made it so well in anyone's history. And the historian assures us that it was the printing press that made Luther --- no Gutenberg no Luther!

My mind wandered with those words . . . *and God said, let there be a printing press upon the earth, and it was so; and God saw that it was good.* God created the printing press by creating that old genius, Johann Gutenberg, whose first press could produce more elaborate work than the modern machines! God knew what he was doing. The Chinese had the know-how, but God had to raise up a people who would carve down the alphabet to just 26 letters, making mass printing possible.

We are left to wonder why the printing press was so late in coming. It meant that the masses could not have their own copy of the Scriptures for 15 long centuries. Even longer, for it is only in recent centuries, what some call "modern times," that nearly everyone, at least in the western world, could have a Bible of his own. The Bible was chained to the pulpit, not so much because the church did not want the people to have access to it, but because of its great value and scarcity. Even with the printing press it was a long time before people could afford a Bible. Illiteracy was another factor, for many people could not have read a Bible if they had one.

This super-abundance of having a Bible in every room of the house is very recent in Christian history, and it may be debatable as to whether it is a blessing. We have succeeded in making the Bible the most published, the most purchased book in the world, but it is also largely unread and little understood. One wonders if the church still had to learn the Scriptures by hearing them read and taught in the assembly, whether the rank and file of believers would not know more. At least we would probably read the Scriptures more seriously and more extensively and do less sermonizing. That would be a blessing!

And how many heretics and sects have been created with a Bible in every purse or hip pocket? And how much has a universal prevalence of the Bible contributed to its deification by many? Even among ourselves the Bible has come to be viewed as "the Word of God" (is it or is Jesus?), and the basis of fellowship. And to be accepted into many fellowships one must come up with a rather exact understanding of particular biblical teaching.

None of these things might have been if we had the limitations of the early Christians, who not only had no *New Testament* but no Scripture at all in their possession. They learned the Scriptures by hearing them read at meetings, and like their Jewish forebears

they committed certain portions to memory. They taught them to their children. But "the Bible" was not their bond of unity and fellowship, for there was no such thing as we know it. It was the Person that the Scriptures spoke of, the Christ proclaimed by the apostles, that made them one and gave them a glorious fellowship. "Unity upon the Bible" is a modern myth. There is no such thing, never has been, never will be. Jesus and only Jesus can unite us. No book can do it, not even the Bible, which the church will always interpret differently.

If this kind of thinking bothers you, I would remind you that for the vast majority of the time since Pentecost the church has had no Bible such as we have it today. And it pleased God to wait for many centuries before providing the means, the printing press and still later the economics and the literacy, for everyone to have a Bible. But we have always had Jesus and sufficient access to "what was written" to know the basic facts of our faith. With a plethora of Bibles has come a preoccupation with a myriad of details. It has even given us that strange animal known as "the silence of the Scriptures."

I am not saying of course that the wide distribution of Scripture, made possible by recent wealth and technology, is not a blessing. But I am saying that like so many blessings it is a mixed blessing. But what is there in this world, however good, that is not mixed with evil? This is one way to point out that we generally hold some questionable views about the Bible, especially in making it the basis and object of our faith. The earliest believers would not know what we were taking about! They would see such Scriptures as they had as the basis of their faith only as they pointed to the Christ, heaven's gift to sinful man. And loyalty to Christ was their only test. We terribly err if we go beyond this.

But it is the printing press, along with uncommon wealth and the free market, that has placed a Bible in every room of my home, and I thank God. And I marvel at what printing and publication makes possible in a world that would seem closed without them. An illustration much more modest than Luther's reformation, which printing made possible, is this little journal. My efforts are directed toward a very small segment of that church Luther sought to reform, and it is the printed page that gives wings to my message, just as it did to his.

I thought of this recently when a Texas preacher was being asked whom he knew among us. Various Church of Christ leaders were asked about, some of whom he knew and some he did not. "Do you know Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett?," he was asked. He laughed at the question and replied, "Of course, everyone knows them." He was of course restricting himself to the Church of Christ world. He could have added, even if with some exaggeration, that everyone knows what we stand for and what we are trying to do, whether they be friend or foe.

And why? The miracle of printing. Carl and Nell Ketcherside, using their kitchen table for their layout, sent *Mission Messenger* far and wide for some 36 years, calling for unity based upon *the* truth rather than doctrinal conformity, and reaching multiplied thousands whose lives could not have been touched in any other way. The written message not only has the advantage of being read over and over again, but it can be retrieved from the fire after it has been tossed there in anger. There's nothing like the truth that emanates from the pages of a charred journal! And sometimes the copies are not read until years afterwards, only after being stashed away through indifference.

The printed page has fired many a revolution, Luther's being only one. But they've all had one thing in common with Luther: they've addressed themselves to the rank and file, the peasants, or the folk in the pews, leaving it to the "professionals" to write stuff that nobody reads or couldn't read if they chose to. The historian I was reading said Luther always did it with a touch of humor, another important ingredient in any reformation. We need to be invited to laugh at ourselves more than we do. And Luther did it mostly with pamphlets something like an issue of this journal. It is amazing the changes that can be wrought by a modest little paper, and it doesn't take multitudes to do it.

In lauding the printing press we must not overstate the case, for some of the church's most glorious victories needed no such technology. The chances are that our brethren of bygone centuries understood the message more clearly and loved it more dearly than ourselves, with or without such an advantage. God was a long time in giving us printing, and one of these days, amidst the crises of the tomorrows, we may be without it again, including the Bible. But there is no power, demonic or angelic, that can take Jesus from us, let come what may.

So, it was the printing press that God created on the eighth day, not the Dallas Cowboys. And what a difference that has made. The printing press, I mean! --- *the Editor*

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THEY WON'T READ!

Blessed is he who reads. (Rev. 1:3)

It is a common complaint of those who would change their world, *They won't read!* Even when we go to the trouble of researching the stuff, putting it into print, and delivering it to their front door (and sometimes even handing it to them), still they won't read it. Or will they? We have to admit that while many do not care to read anything much, especially when it challenges them to think along different lines, some will and do read, even stuff with which they disagree.

It is a sobering truth that the God of heaven chose to disclose his will to certain prophets and apostles who were not only to speak the word that God revealed but to write it as well. The Creator intends that we learn of him by reading, and this in a world where a substantial percentage of the population has always been illiterate. This means that those who can read are to study the Scriptures and convey the teaching to those who can't read. It may also mean that part of our mission is to teach the world to read.

The inability of so many through the centuries to read has been only part of the problem, for during most of human history the masses had no literature to read, or very little, even if they could read. For many centuries the Bible was chained to the pulpit, not so much because the church did not want it read (assuming there were those who could read it), but to keep it from being stolen. For the first fourteen centuries of the church's history all Bibles, as well as all other books, had to be copied by hand. Even with the coming of the printing press in about 1450, it was centuries more before the Bible was generally available to the masses, due to poverty as well as illiteracy, and only then to the more enlightened nations of the world. Even today the Bible is an unknown volume and unavailable to large segments of the world's population, which implies, of course, that God will not judge them by that volume, but by other ways he has revealed himself to them.

How about us? We are inundated with books of all kinds and we have the Bible, in several translations, in most every room of our homes. Endowed with such literary riches we still do not read all that much.

With the circumstances as they were, it is understandable that Rev. 1:3 would promise: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near." It is a reference to *public* reading to the assembly, and refers, of course, only to *Revelation.* It was to be read to the believers, and the reader would be blessed, along with the hearers, if they heeded its message. Other references to reading indicate that it was part of the service, such as I Thess. 5:27: "I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren," and "Until I come, give attention to the (public) reading (of Scripture), to exhortation, and teaching." (I Tim. 4:13).

It is enough to say that the great God of heaven is the infinite educator. He discloses his mind to us in propositional statements to be read. Thus we have the Scriptures, which can be read and studied continually. All this adds up to God's intention for each of us, that we be cultivated and educated in the ways of God.

If we can read but won't read, whether the Bible or other good books, it can only be because we don't want to badly enough. The "want to" needs fixing!

To say that we are too busy to read only condemns us, for we know that we find time, at least some time, to do what we really want to do. While the complaint that there is too much to read has some validity, it does not mean that we cannot read some things. Even a few minutes a day is a good start.

We should espouse causes that we believe to be both valid and crucial: the unity of all mankind, the liberation of the world from all forms of tyranny, the enlightenment of all God's children. Such a mission calls for no gimmickry or clever advertising techniques, but we *must* have the printed page. Apart from a return to serious reading there is no way to change our world. No reading, no renewal. It is just that simple --- and just that critical. We read or we perish! This implies, of course, that there must be good stuff to read.

Insofar as this little journal is concerned, there is cause for hope, for our people seem more eager to read searchingly and critically than ever before. I am persuaded that if we will *say something* and not simply fill columns with print as one stacks empty cartons, that the people, *enough* of the people, will read.

Thomas Carlyle said it well when he wrote: "All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been: it is lying in magic preservation in the pages of books." How blessed we are that there is no knowledge, practically speaking, that is not deposited somewhere in some book. We should search for the ideas that really matter as one would seek silver and gold. And always the end in view is to glorify God and enhance man's way of life. The search for truth never ceases so long as we are in this world, and that search surely will affect where and how we will spend eternity. Perhaps the search goes on. But woe unto us if we have no interest in the search for truth in this world.

Just now at our house in Denton, Texas we are reading and talking about Japan and Thailand, for I will soon be spending a month in those two countries. Ouida joins me in learning about these fantastic peoples, their culture, religion, economy, values, ideals, as well as their history and geography. Ouida will be better prepared to appreciate my letters from Tokyo, where I will visit churches and missionaries, and Chiangmai, where I will teach in a seminary and visit churches in the back country. Through-out the journey I will read and listen, as well as teach, watching out for liberating and liberalizing truths and ideas. Ouida reports that she has already learned that from any place in Japan one can see a mountain!

I agree with Mortimer J. Adler that "Reading is the only basic tool in the living of the good life." I arose at six this a.m., which is now long before dawn. In a matter of minutes I was at my desk reading for only a half hour or so before taking off for my two-mile walk. I had a few minutes with *Romans,* for I will be teaching it to the Laotians and the Thais in Chiangmai (considering what difference an interpreter will make). I was reminded once

more of Paul's insistence that sin is not to "reign" within us, now that we have died with Christ and have been raised with him, and so we are to be "dead to sin." It is a remarkable teaching in view of the fact that he also insists that the old man of sin is always with us. The point must be that "sin shall not be master over you," as in Rom. 6:14 and the apostle insists that it is grace (not law keeping) that keeps the dogs of sin at bay, even if they now and again nip at our heels. Mastery is the key. Christ rules our hearts through his Spirit, not sin.

Then I had a few minutes with a book that pained me, which meaningful reading often does. *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* is co-authored by Francis Schaeffer, the renowned Christian writer, and C. Everett Koop, M.D., who is Surgeon General of our nation. This moving book deals with the frightening loss of human rights brought on by abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. I found it frightening that some who seek to manipulate our society have seriously suggested waiting several days before deciding whether to allow a newly born to live.

I found myself grimacing with Dr. Koop, who must be a courageous Christian physician (and whose appointment as Surgeon General was strongly opposed by pro-abortionists), when he asked the disturbing question, "If a mother can kill her own children, then what can be next?" He was terribly disturbed that a high court of justice would actually sanction the parental decision to allow a baby to starve to death rather than to live with a (not so serious) handicap, as in the famed case of "Baby Doe."

Then I went out for my walk while it was still dark. A mile down our street, at the end of Windsor Dr. that breaks out into a large field, I saw the eastern sky aflame with orange rays, a burst of beauty that would inspire the poet's heart. Old Sol, whom I had seen retire the evening before from a nearby park where I take my granddaughter, was about ready to get up and do his thing again, which he does quite well, especially in Texas. There was also rain in the air. As I returned home, with the smell of rain on my jacket, I thought of something else I once read. A reporter walked in out of the rain into a prison cell block to visit with a man who was momentarily to be executed for a grievous crime. The reporter wrote of the smell of fresh rain on his coat as he bade farewell to his friend --- the smell of rain, so fresh, so alive, so hopeful, over against the stench of an impending death. The dying man's last smell of earth was that of refreshing rain. While I read that story long years ago, I thought of it again as I blotted the rain drops from my face with a clean towel. Someone has wisely observed that we should choose our books as we do our friends, for they have such an influence upon us.

While I have read and studied some more during the day, I started the day with at least some reading. It is like the goal of doing a good deed each day: if you don't get it done early in the day you might not get it done. Early reading gets one off to a good start, nurture to the soul, tonic to the mind.

And soon reading is a joy, and therein lies the secret. And there is no question that we can discipline ourselves to the point that we fall in love with reading. If a man can teach himself to sit in front of the tube and *enjoy* watching gladiators on an athletic field blast the living daylights out of each other, he should have no problem in forming a delightful friendship with Goldsmith or Emerson or Lincoln or Shakespeare or Lord Byron or John Mark. And where there is joy no one has to be coaxed or cajoled. It is like kissing your wife! --- *the Editor*

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OUR DEBT TO MARTIN LUTHER

If ever there was a time to consider our debt to Martin Luther, this would be the time, for the 500th anniversary of his birth in Eisleben, Germany was celebrated this year on Nov. 10. While the church has long celebrated Reformation Sunday on or near Oct. 31 each year, it does not hurt to notice the close proximity of the two dates.

The first date reminds us that the reformer was born in humble circumstances. His father was first a peasant and then a miner. Both parents were harsh disciplinarians, sometimes beating Martin until the blood flowed. Luther once confessed that it may have been the beatings that led him to a cloistered life in a monastery. And they bequeathed to him an image of God that reflected their own mood: a hard father and strict judge who demanded joyless obedience, one who exacted constant propitiation and who would at last condemn to hell most of the human race. He grew up in a superstitious family of seven children who believed in witches and elves as well as angels and demons. Life for him in Eisleben as a boy, a village of but 3,000, was typical of those traits we associate with "the dark ages." He was flogged at school 15 times in one day for misdeclining a noun!

The second date, Oct. 31, 1517, has become pivotal in history, for on that day Luther tacked a list of 95 propositions on the door of the Wittenberg church to be debated, thus launching, even if unintentional, the great Protestant Reformation. The lowly monk thus set in motion forces that led to the break-up of the Holy Roman Empire. The world would never be the same, and we are all benefactors, especially in terms of a free church and freedom of conscience.

But what Thomas Carlyle called “the greatest moment in the modern history of man” was not what happened at the door of the Wittenberg church in 1517, but what happened at Worms, Germany in 1521. In less than four years Luther had become such a powerful figure that pope and emperor alike were trying to limit his influence. One church dignitary complained that “All Germany is up in arms against Rome and papal bulls are laughed at.” The main thing Luther had going for him was that almost everyone, including the pope, conceded that ecclesiastical reforms were needed. When both pope and emperor asked Erasmus, who was highly esteemed by all, what to do about Luther, he urged them to leave him alone in his efforts to purge the church of abuses.

But Erasmus was sometimes more direct, for when the Elector Frederick asked him to name Luther’s most serious errors, he replied: “Two: he attacked the pope in his crown and the monks in their bellies.”

Luther was at last summoned by the authorities to the Diet at Worms to give an account of himself. Carlyle may be right in calling it the greatest moment in modern history. It was fraught with danger for Luther, for heretics were usually imprisoned or burned at the stake. He ignored the pleas of his friends that he not go to Worms, and when he reached the edge of the city he received a note warning him to return to Wittenberg.

This is when he made that daring statement that has lived through the centuries: “Though there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the roof, I will go there.”

A band of knights rode out to meet him and 2,000 people gathered about his carriage, eclipsing the arrival of the emperor himself, who came to preside over Luther’s judgment. Luther would survive. He was too popular to destroy. The pope had offered clemency and had ordered the authorities not to harm him, if only he would recant.

If Luther ever weakened it was when he first stood before the Diet, which was an awesome court of princes, nobles, prelates, burghers, and a personal representative of the pope, armed with both papal authority and forensic eloquence, beside young Emperor Charles V of Germany. As Luther stood near a table containing his books and pamphlets that had ignited a revolution, he was asked if he was the author of the books and would he retract the heresies contained in them. He humbly admitted that the books were his, but as for retracting them he begged for time to consider. The emperor gave him one day. Martin Luther would never again be so yielding to the princes of the church.

Sensing that a turning point in history was at hand, his supporters came to him at his lodging that night urging him to be steadfast, some of whom came from the Diet itself. The next day, April 18, 1521, there was standing-room only in the Diet chamber. Now when

asked if he would repudiate his writings, he avowed that the ecclesiastical abuses he had attacked were generally admitted. When the emperor exploded with a *No!*, the reformer went on to expose the emperor himself with: “Should I recant at this point, I would open the door to more tyranny and impiety, and it will be all the worse should it appear that I had done so at the instance of the Holy Roman Empire.”

As for the doctrinal portion of his books, which included his emphasis upon justification by faith only, he agreed to retract anything that was shown to be contrary to Scripture. The prosecutor chided him for a trick used by every heretic, including Wycliffe and Huss, that of appealing to Scripture. “How can you assume to be the only one who understands Scripture?”, he was asked, and “You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith, instituted by Christ the perfect Lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the Apostles, sealed by the red blood of martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, and defined by the Church.” And the prosecutor reminded Luther that the pope did not allow them even to discuss the issues. He pressed the reformer, still dressed as a monk though he would soon reject all clerical garb, for an unequivocal answer: *Do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?*

Luther told the Diet in no uncertain terms that he did not accept the authority of popes and councils, and that if they could not convict him by the testimony of sacred Scripture “I cannot and will not recant anything.’” *My conscience* is *captive to the Word of God*, he told them, which became the essence of the Protestant faith.

A memorial to Luther’s honor in Worms today has engraved upon it “Here I stand, I can do no other,” which he supposedly said on the occasion, and one biography of Luther is entitled *Here I Stand.* Since these words do not appear in the records of the Diet but only in the first printed version of the speech, it is likely that they are not authentic. But it doesn’t matter, for he said enough. It was not what he said at Worms that made such a difference in history as what he did. He challenged the authority of popes, councils, and priests, and appealed to the Scriptures as the only authority in religion. For this we are all in Luther’s debt. He was God’s man at the right place and the right time. Even the day before was still too soon!

All of this grew out of Luther’s struggle to find peace in the doctrine of salvation by works. He was taught at the monastery that one could become righteous by doing good works, by being obedient to the authorities, and by saying the right prayers. He drove his superiors to distraction in his passion to find the peace of God in his heart. While his order *was* to read the Bible, they urged him not to read it so much, and they chided him for the “toy sins” he was always confessing. There was one big question that haunted Luther’s mind, and it was the answer to that question, *What* is *faith?,* that turned his life around.

While visiting Rome in 1511 in behalf of his order, he made a pilgrimage to the usual holy places about the city, which included the *scala sancta* or "holy stairs," which, according to tradition led up to Pilate's porch where Jesus was condemned. They had supposedly been brought from Jerusalem back in the fourth century. While climbing these stairs *on his knees,* whereby he would gain indulgences that freed him from doing penance after confession, he found (by intuition?) his answer to the meaning of faith. He stood up and *walked* back down the steps, declaring to himself *The just shall live by faith!* What was a desecration of a holy place to the traditional Roman Catholic was to Luther a profession of faith and a declaration of freedom.

He soon wrote into the margin of his Latin Bible alongside Rom. 1:17 the word *sole* --- "The just shall live by faith *only."* In view of the answer he worked out on his knees --- that one is made right with God through faith in Christ apart from works - he was right that salvation is by faith only. He was never able to reconcile *James* ("not by faith only") with the great liberating truth he had found, and so that letter became to him "an epistle of straw," which probably meant that it would not satisfy a starving soul as *Romans* does.

Erasmus, always a friend to Luther, encouraged him to criticize the church as he would, even the pope, but not to leave the church. It was understandable advice, but, as we all know, it did not turn out that way. Erasmus realized that a "Lutheran" church would only spawn more sects. But if the Lutheran revolt bequeathed to us more sects it also gave us the greatest gift of all, *freedom in Christ.*

Our own heritage in the Stone-Campbell movement owes much to Martin Luther, for we have always been a people of the Bible, insisting that the Scriptures alone are our guide in all matters of faith and practice. This was Lutheran before it was Campbellian. But Luther bequeathed even more in that he tied the individual's conscience only to the word of God, not to popes or church councils. He moved us from the authority of the church to the authority of the Bible, with each person responsible to God for the way he interprets and responds to the Bible.

My conscience is captive to the Word of God! It is a glorious heritage. It is the essence of what it means to be a Protestant. --- *the Editor*

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HONEST BEN

Robert Meyers

I have of late been visiting different churches, and the experience reminds me of something read once in Ben Franklin's *Autobiography.* Ben is nothing if not honest in his description of how he went off on occasion to Philadelphia and was from time to time prevailed upon to go to church, once for five Sundays in a row. Had the minister been different, this might have turned into a habit, a possibility Ben admits:

"Had he been in my opinion a good preacher, perhaps I might have continued, notwithstanding the occasion I had for the Sunday's leisure in my course of study; but his discourses were chiefly either polemic arguments, or explications of the peculiar doctrines of our sect, and were all to me very dry, uninteresting, and unedifying, since not a single moral principle was inculcated or enforced, their aim seeming to be rather to make us Presbyterians than good citizens."

One day the minister took for himself a text which promised more. When he chose Phillippians 4:8 ("Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, or of good report, if there be any virtue, or any praise, think on these things"), Franklin supposed the sermon would at last contain some morality.

"But he confined himself to five points only, as meant by the apostle, viz.: 1. Keeping holy the Sabbath day. 2. Being diligent in reading the holy Scriptures. 3. Attending duly the publick worship. 4. Partaking of the Sacrament. 5. Paying a due respect to God's ministers. These might be all good things; but, as they were not the kind of good things that I expected from that text, I despaired of ever meeting with them from any other, was disgusted, and attended his preaching no more."

There is nothing wrong, of course, in any of the five admonitions given by the preacher, even that rather self-serving last one, but that Paul's wide-ranging poetry should have been reduced to these legalisms is too much like what some of us have found too often in pulpits.

There is, by the way, a little later in Franklin's *Autobiography* a story which illustrates a weakness we all share. Ben recalls a neighbor of his who bought an axe from a blacksmith. The blacksmith agreed to grind the face of the axe bright for the purchaser if he would turn the wheel. The man agreed and turned the wheel while the smith pressed the broad face of the axe hard and heavily on the stone, which made the turning of it very fatiguing.

Every now and then the buyer stepped over from the wheel to see how the work was going. Finally he said he would take his axe as it was, with no more grinding. "No," said the smith, "turn on, turn on; we shall have it bright by and by; as yet, it is only speckled."

"Yes," said the man, "but I think I like a speckled axe best."

Surely I am not the only one like that neighbor of Ben's. We think we want certain things, but as the cost of having them goes up much higher than we had supposed it might, we ruefully settle for much less and go home happy with a speckled axe.

With Ben Franklin still on my mind, I remember a great utterance by Roger Williams in a book of his called *The Bloudy Tenent.* Said he: "In vaine have English Parliaments permitted English Bibles in the poorest English houses, and the simplest man or woman to search the Scriptures, if yet against their soules perswasion from the Scripture, they should be forced (as if they lived in Spaine or Rome itself without the sight of a Bible) to beleeve as the Church beleeves."

We still find it hard to accept this kind of freedom for all Christians, don't we? The tendency of almost every Church is to force its own interpretations upon all who would be a part of it. Liberty is too costly for most of us; we do not prize it enough to pay the price and stand before God with no bulwark but our own consciences.

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WHERE FLOWERS GROW

Robert Meyers

When I was a small boy, living near the tracks as befitted my economic status, I had great fun with nails and passing trains. A nail laid lengthwise on the track got smashed into a lovely miniature steel sword. Pennies came out of it with some peculiarities, too, until my father explained that something called the Treasury Department took a dim view of spoiling money.

Assorted other objects served for exciting experiments, however, and once there was that inevitable excitement: a vagrant bum, befumed by wine, had lain down on the track and lost both his legs. We boys speculated endlessly on the way this had happened and how it had looked, our mothers having been far too wise to let us go see.

Now that I'm grown up railroads have maturer uses. They carry trains, for one thing, and they provide junior high school art classes with material for illustrating perspective. But there is a third. Since no one ever really looks at a railroad it is a handy thing to walk down if one is searching for solitude. A man walking down a railroad is all but invisible and certain to be let strictly alone. It may be that we still associate the tracks with the bums of Depression days and simply avoid seeing them, or anyone who walks on them. Whatever the reason, you can walk down a railroad track and be sure of privacy.

On a recent visit to my mother's home town, I enjoyed this privilege as a way of getting from her house out to the farm where we lived years ago. And during the walk I had an experience from which the poetic mind, which is every mind in one degree or other, can draw an analogy. I came suddenly upon some patches of exquisite little wild flowers growing alongside the tracks.

They were so appealing that I stopped to pick one and look at it more closely. The petals were white, tinged with faint purple at the outer edges, and clustered around the golden yellow pollen of the center. Fragile and tiny, they seemed oddly out of place beside the railroad track with its worn steel flanges, its tarred ties, its oil-soaked gravel and chemically-poisoned grasses drooping rustily in the hot sun. One simply did not expect the white purity of a delicate wildflower in that unlikely place. The eye alighted upon it with a definite shock.

And a shock is all that is needed to set the mind to making analogies. I could not help thinking of how many times I have been similarly surprised at finding unexpected beauty. Among some of the roughest and poorest and most ignorant of men I have discovered miniature flowers of rare delicacy and tenderness. In the cunning thief, a strange nobility about women. In the town drunk, an unexpected and compassionate insight into the foibles of mankind. In the faded prostitute, an odd wistfulness about innocence lost almost to memory, even.

To find these small flowers, hidden from the casual glance by weeds and dirt and the used remnants of trade, is instruction in both wonder and tolerance. In wonder, because the mind marvels at the odd juxtaposition of the beautiful and the ugly. In tolerance, because the mind confesses that in the unlikeliest of places one must always be on the alert for that which excites admiration and love.Church people sometimes suppose that the only flowers worth exclaiming over are found in their pews. It is true that cultivated flowers are often far more beautiful and expansive than those which grow in unfavorable soil and without care. But it is a grievous mistake to think that there is no need to keep the eyes open when one walks through the byways and garbage heaps. It is a humbling experience to find growing, even there, the evidence that God cares for beauty and can create it in the most forbidding places. --- *338 Fairway, Wichita, KS 67212*

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BOOK NOTES

The second printing of *The Stone-Campbell Movement* is now available, so those who have waited for it will have to wait no longer. We continue to get vigorous commendations of the book from across the country and even abroad. If you have not yet purchased a copy, we will send you one for 21.95 and pay the postage if you send a check with your order.

Also related to our heritage is two important reprints. *Life of Elder John Smith* tells the story of old "Raccoon," the pioneer Kentucky preacher who was a movement all to himself, 12.95 postpaid. *Elder Ben Frank-lin,* a new book by Earl West, is especially important in understanding what happened to our people following the Civil War. 14.95 pp.

We have a new supply of *Do Yourself A Favor: Love Your Wife,* which Pat Boone called "a wonderful blessing," and it could well change your life or that of a friend. 3.50 postpaid.

For 6.95 we will send you *The Search for Christian America,* written by three authors. It tells of our country's Christian origins and takes a long look at the idea of "Christian America" by asking if our institutions and wars (including the Revolutionary War) were really Christian. The section of secular humanism will especially interest you.

God's Answer to Personal Problems, which is part of the College Press series on *What the Bible Says,* is a veritable goldmine of material on dealing with problems. Parents and ministers alike will gain much from its many insights. 13.50 postpaid.

We will send you a five-pac of C. S. Lewis for 16.00, or 3.50 each. They are: *Mere Christianity, The Problem of Pain, The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters, Miracles.* It you have not read Lewis, you will revel in these delightful volumes, a matching set of paperbacks.

We will send you 18 back issues of this journal, selected at random, for only 3.00. *Jesus Today,* our bound volume of this journal for 1981-82, is available for 8.50 postpaid.

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Our readers were interested in our news item about a merger of a Christian Church and a Church of Christ in Fenton, Michigan. Having recently visited in that area I can give a brief update on that merger. The two churches, now one, meet in the old Fenton Church of

Christ building, and they are doing great. They say that in union they have a higher percentage of “workers” than previously. They resolved the instrument issue by having a 15 or 20 minute “instrumental service” of singing, etc. the first thing on Sunday a.m. After that it is acappella. Those whose consciences do not allow them to sing with the instrument can come at the break. This has long been the practice of non-Sunday School brethren in Sunday School churches. They don’t attend Sunday School. Some leaders report that a lot of their folk are “non Sunday School” who are not supposed to be!

The *Christian Chronicle* recently reported that there is a “pulpit shortage” among Churches of Christ. just as in most other churches. The editor told of one church that had 60 applicants for its vacant pulpit, and he refers to “the desperation of preachers in search of preaching jobs.” This might impress one as an odd news item for a people who claim to have “restored the true church.” Were evangelists desperate for “open pulpits” in New Testament times or was it some other way?

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READERS' EXCHANGE

I have read and re-read your “Churches of Christ Debate Homosexuality” (April 1983), especially the part about the gay physician. I agree with your statement “every indication was that his orientation was natural and not learned.” I believe that being homosexual is a natural thing. My love for God is different than my love for any man on earth. I promised God many years ago that I would never love anyone more than I love Him. I feel that while I am as I am here on earth, I would like to have someone to love, to share my life and my God with, and I feel it will have to be a man, not a woman. Right or wrong, I still believe that God made me and loves me even if society says I am homosexual. --- *Name withheld, though not requested.*

From the scriptures we learn of no one ever telling Jesus that they loved him! Jesus tried to get Peter to say it, but Peter would only admit friendship. Why were they so reluctant? Were they intimidated by the thought that Jesus knew their real thoughts, feelings. and actions? Would they join us in singing, “My Jesus I love Thee”? --- *Cecil Hook, New Braunfels, TX*

Your publication awakened me to the fact that there were others in the Church of Christ who struggled with the same issues I was dealing with. That began the process of affirmation of my dawning consciousness. You freed me further by your permission to visit other churches. I’ve lived in this Pharisaical structure so long I needed permis-

sion! . . .I have had to leave. It has been the most wrenching, frightening, hurtful thing I've ever done. . .We are now at St. Phillips Episcopal Church. The peace we are beginning to experience is further confirmation that it was "right." Our children have had a hard adjustment, but we talk constantly about "working out your own salvation." I want to give them the tools to do this when the time comes. There are people at this church who have been immersed because they were led to that by God after studying. The Episcopal Church as a whole is open to the spirit of God. So I feel that at this time it's where we must be. --- *Paula Benton, Breward. NC.*

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